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# VCU MENORAH

## REVIEW

NUMBER 60 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • WINTER 2004

### *For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

**America and the  
Holocaust, Revisited:  
Notes on the Writing of  
A Race Against Death: Peter  
Bergson, America and the  
Holocaust**  
New York: The New Press

A Review Essay  
by Rafael Medoff

When David S. Wyman was working on the manuscript of what was to become his best-seller, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*, he spent several days in 1973 interviewing Hillel Kook who, under the *nom de plume* Peter Bergson, initiated political action campaigns to bring about U.S. intervention against the Holocaust. The Wyman-Kook interviews, preserved on a reel-to-reel tape recorder and occupying more than 400 pages in transcript form, provided Professor Wyman with crucial background information about the period as well as a unique insider's perspective from someone who had been at the center of the struggle to influence American policy toward European Jewry. When the manuscript for *The Abandonment of the Jews* was completed, the interview transcript went into deep storage along with thousands of other documents used for the book.

There it remained for more than a quarter-century, until I approached David to contribute to an issue of *American Jewish History* that I was guest-editing. The issue's theme was "America and the Holocaust: New Perspectives," and it was inconceivable to me that such a collection could be published without a contribution from the author of the most influential book in the field. Although retired from teaching (at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst) and busy researching a book on a very different topic (minor league baseball), David graciously offered to prepare an annotated excerpt from his 1973 interview with Kook. Our discussions about the excerpt soon led us to the decision to prepare the full text of

the interview for publication as a book.

Well, *almost* the full text. The bulk of the interview focused on Kook's campaigns for U.S. rescue of Jewish refugees but a portion dealt with his post-Holocaust activity on behalf of the cause of Jewish statehood. In addition, as is the case in any interview of this nature, there were sections in which Kook digressed into subjects of lesser interest to potential readers. Opting to focus on the rescue battle rather than compose a full-scale biography of Kook, we decided to omit the post-1945 topics. David and I set to work editing the transcript, preparing a lengthy introduction to provide historical background and context, inserting explanatory comments in the text to make the subject matter more comprehensible to lay readers, and composing the extensive footnotes and endnotes.

While an oral history is by no means a task as arduous as researching and writing a conventional history book, it was nonetheless a complex and time-consuming endeavor. Sharing the burden with a co-author facilitated the process greatly. Having the good fortune to share it with a brilliant historian, consummate professional and true gentleman such as David Wyman made the work a pleasure. We were blessed with an editor of extraordinary talent and vision, Andre Schiffrin. As an editor at Pantheon in the 1980s, Andre had shepherded *Abandonment* through the publication process. In 2001, as founder and director of The New Press, Andre took the Kook interview project under his wing.

Work on the book proceeded quickly—so quickly, in fact, that it was nearing completion

in the spring of 2002 before we had settled on a title. Some of the staff at The New Press preferred a different type of title, along the lines of "Peter Bergson and the Struggle to Rescue Europe's Jews." David and I thought otherwise. There was a variety of factors to consider and we spent many hours discussing them.

To begin with, should we use the name "Peter Bergson," even though it was a pseudonym that he used for less than eight years of his life? (He adopted it when he arrived in America to shield his family in British Mandatory Palestine, including his uncle the Chief Rabbi, from embarrassment concerning his controversial political activity.) Or should we use his real name, Hillel Kook, even though he was far better known, then and now, as Bergson? (It happened that Kook passed away, after a long illness, while we were at work on the book and his family put both names on his tombstone, although that did not influence our decision.) Our compromise solution was to use Bergson in the title, where instant name recognition mattered most, and Kook as much as possible in the text, where we would have room to explain the circumstances surrounding his adoption of the pseudonym.

At the same time, because even the name Bergson is not widely known, we resolved to restrict "Bergson" to the subtitle and use in the title better known words that would indicate the nature of the subject matter—Holocaust, America, Jews, Hitler, European Jewry. But as we juggled various combinations, we found such terms to be more problematic than we had anticipated. They were too similar to the titles of existing books; or they were too broad and thus misleading as to our book's content; or they were too dry to pique a reader's curiosity.

In an attempt to stimulate new ideas, David shared with me a fascinating document from his *Abandonment* files: his notes on possible titles for that book. The title *The Abandonment of the Jews* is so well known and such an ingrained part of the public conversation about America and the Holocaust that it is difficult to imagine the book having been published under another title. But it almost was. Reading David's notes

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was like discovering that the famous Beatle's song "Yesterday" was originally called "Scrambled Eggs."

David had settled on "America and the Holocaust" for his subtitle and was searching for a phrase for the title that would encapsulate the book's theme. Among those he seriously considered were "Complicity," "Years of Shame," "Bitter Priorities" and "Acquiescence in the Murder of the Jews"—the latter derived from the title of a report prepared by Treasury Department officials who had uncovered the State Department's secret sabotage of opportunities to rescue Jewish refugees. David's notes indicate that several titles based on Biblical verses were also contenders, such as "None to Save Them" (Psalm 18:41) and "Thy Brother's Blood" (Genesis 4:10). Two derived from famous quotations were also among the finalists: "The Frail Web," from a 1940 John Dos Passos refugee fundraising appeal which declared, "Our only hope will lie in the frail web of understanding of one man for the pain of another"; and "The Anvil of Indifference," from a 1943 speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the House of Lords in which he described Europe's Jews as "caught between the hammer of the enemy's brutality and the anvil of democracy's indifference." "The Abandonment of the Jews" was such a late entry that it did not even appear in David's three-page list of possible titles. It was, as Elie Wiesel later noted, a "perfect reflection of [the book's] content." How could David and I now find a title that would perfectly reflect the contents of the Wyman-Kook interview?

As it turned out, the answer had been staring us in the face the whole time. One of the most important members of the Bergson group had been Ben Hecht, the playwright, journalist and Academy Award-winning screenwriter, a wordsmith if there ever was one, who designed many of the full-page newspaper ads that the Bergson group used to publicize the rescue issue. In fact, nine of those ads were scheduled to be reprinted in the book. Surely one of those eyebrow-raising headlines of Hecht's could give us a title that would both pack a punch and do justice to the manuscript: "Action—Not Pity—Can Save Millions Now" ... "How Well Are You Sleeping? Is There Something You Could Have Done to Save Millions of Innocent People—Men, Women and Children—from Torture and Death?" ... "Help Prevent 4,000,000 People from Becoming Ghosts." As we scoured the headlines and sub-headlines for inspiration, two in particular caught our attention: "Time Races Death: What Are We Waiting For?" and "This Is Strictly a Race Against Death." The image of someone desperately "racing" to save others from "death"—the sense of urgency that Hecht had been trying to convey in his ads—precisely captured the spirit

of the Bergson rescue campaign that our book chronicled. "A Race Against Death," subtitled "Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust," was a perfect reflection of the book's content. At last, the manuscript was complete.

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## The Road to Jewish Nationalism

*Zionism and the Fin De Siecle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*  
by Michael Stanislawski  
Berkeley: University of California Press

*A Review Essay*  
by Brian Horowitz

This latest work is an attempt by the renowned historian of Russian Jewry, Michael Stanislawski, to review our understanding of the origins of Zionism. Indeed, we discover a paradox. How is it that many of Zionism's most revered leaders were actually deeply cosmopolitan intellectuals who knew no Hebrew and rather little about the Jewish tradition? Scholars have mostly explained this paradox by dividing the lives of such figures as Theodore Herzl, Max Nordau and Vladimir Jabotinsky into two parts, before their transformation from "assimilationists" to Jewish nationalists. But, as Stanislawski noticed, such a divide is unconvincing since all three of these individuals continued to abide by a cosmopolitan, Western-European cultural orientation, even applying their cosmopolitan views to the sphere of Zionist practice and theory. As an answer, Stanislawski offers the notion of the European fin de siecle, that period between the 19th and 20th centuries, which brought powerful new ideas of the role of culture, the purpose of the individual and nation. Through this new lens, we are better able to understand the psychological conflicts, intellectual confrontations and particular Jewish tendencies that brought about the highly unlikely result: such deeply cosmopolitan and artistically acute individuals as Herzl, Nordau and Jabotinsky who became unbending Zionists.

In the case of Herzl, Stanislawski discovered that even while Zionism's leader was heading in the direction of Jewish na-

tionalism, he was still employing the vocabulary of Viennese salon anti-Semitism. A short story, "Der Sohn," written in 1890, some five years before he became a Zionist, is part of the mystery of Herzl because if events such as the Dreyfus case had turned differently, Herzl might have ended up a convert to Christianity. Similarly, using newly discovered letters between Nordau and a Russian aristocrat Novikova, Stanislawski determines that Nordau, too, was at first not particularly angry at Novikova's anti-Semitism, willing to forgive the grand dame as a price for an erotic liaison. It was only several years later, after his passion had cooled around 1900, that he took personal offence at her anti-Jewish remarks and apparently used this ideological conflict as a means of breaking off their relations. With Zhabotinsky, Stanislawski finds that there doesn't seem to be any distinct moment of transformation since, while he was writing his most uncompromising Zionist propaganda, he was penning the fine decadent novels and stories such as *Piatero*, *Samson* and "Edmee."

The cosmopolitan and decadent source for the anti-cosmopolitan and anti-decadent ideology of Zionism has more than personal importance since Western-European orientations tinted these leaders' conceptions of Zionism. It is well-known, for example, that Herzl wanted Palestine to benefit from the latest technological advancements and to share in the cultural plentitude of Western Europe. Similarly, it is easy to see Nordau's advocacy of the muscular Jew as an antidote to the disease of European culture—the feeble, emaculated decadent intellectual. We also recall that Jabotinsky advocated the use of Western script to write in Hebrew as a means not only of helping new immigrants adjust but as a way to retain closer links with Europe.

The explanation for this paradoxical mixture of cosmopolitan and nationalist thinking lies in the fin de siecle, we are told. In the longest part of the book, the chapters on Jabotinsky, we discover a number of models for his thinking but only some of them originate in the fin de siecle. For example, early in his career, as a journalist in Italy, Jabotinsky was enamored by the Italian radical, Felice Cavallotti, and the Italian patriotic writer, D'Annunzio. Later his economic utopian thinking was influenced by positivism, especially the Austrian Popper Lyneux, a protege of Marx. Incidentally, economic positivism and, especially, nationalism were actually highly untypical of the fin de siecle, at least in its Russian form, which was foremost a cultural movement. Moreover, it strikes this critic as very strange that the major figures of the Russian fin de siecle are never mentioned. Where is Vladimir Solov'ev, Dmitri Merezhkovsky, Vasili Rozanov or Andrey Bely? Alexander Blok

is mentioned only in passing.

But Stanislawski is up to something important here since we see a similar evolution toward nationalism in Russian intellectual history. Several important thinkers of the period, such as Petr Struve, Alexander Blok, Nicholai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov, while starting their careers untainted by nationalist thought, did ultimately arrive at a more narrow pro-Russian position. But the Russians tended to embrace nationalism after 1905 because they had to overcome several obstacles. Self-respecting intellectuals of the time objected to the government's state-sponsored nationalism, connected as it was with anti-Semitism, and, in addition, a concern with the treatment of the non-Russian nationalities was typical of the Russian intelligentsia.

As much as the cosmopolitan fin de siècle played a significant role, other sources also influenced the road to Jewish nationalism. For instance, at the end of the 19th century, we see the emergence of national politics, especially the politics of anti-Semitism. Certainly, the Zionist Congresses mimicked the international Congresses of Anti-Semites. Similarly, contact with the thought of such proto-Zionists as Leon Pinsker, Ahad Ha'am and Menashe Ushishkin, while it did not provide the original inspiration, did influence the development of the thinking of those Zionists studied here. Professor Stanislawski raises broad and very vital questions about the meaning of late 19th-century Western culture in its relation to cosmopolitanism, nationalism and individualism. Moreover, he provides a particularly useful operation by rejoining the two

parts of the lives and work of the early Zionists. Thanks to Professor Stanislawski, we now know a good deal more about the European sources for the thought and behavior of Herzl, Nordau and Jabotinsky. Although Stanislawski's idea of seeking European sources for political Zionism in the fin de siècle will undoubtedly receive further development and correction, the original perception is absolutely valid, important and potentially extremely productive.

*Brian Horowitz is Associate Professor, Director of the Program in Jewish Studies, Sizeler Family Chairholder in Judaic Studies at Tulane University, and a contributing editor.*

## The Reference Shelf by Sarah Barbara Watstein

**Fiction.** *Both works of fiction in this essay deserve the tag line "not to be missed." Two books couldn't be more dissimilar. Here is a book from Holocaust writer Lustig, and an achingly painful and funny collection about growing up female, Jewish and smart. **Lovely Green Eyes.** By Arnost Lustig. This devastatingly beautiful novel explores and delineates the impossible choices one sometimes has to make when the fabric of the world is rent asunder. Meet 15-year-old Hanka Kaudersova, working as one of Dr. Krueger's cleaners in Auschwitz. She and her family have just been transported here from Terezin; her mother and younger brother are quickly dispatched to the gas chambers, and her father has committed suicide. When Dr. Krueger is suddenly transferred to a new post, Hanka fears she will meet the fate that awaits the general camp population. On her last day, she observes girls filing into an office to audition for a position in a German soldier's brothel. She decides to audition, despite the fact she is not 18 and Aryan, hoping her acceptance will ensure her survival. She is accepted and begins a new career in a brothel on the already crumbling eastern front. Theonely way Hanka can cope with her new role is by shutting off her feelings, freezing what is left of her emotions. This is the story of her nightmare and her survival. Professor of literature at American University, Lustig is himself a survivor of the camps. This haunting book deserves a large readership, and Lustig clearly deserves to stand beside other Holocaust writers such as Primo Levi, William Styron and Elie Wiesel.*

**Peace in the House: Tales from a Yiddish Kitchen.** By Faye Moskowitz. A collection of tales about growing up female, Jewish and smart. Here are stories of her parents, their extended families, their neighbors and landsleit, and finally of her own coming of

age in America. What did it mean to this generation to assimilate, to "fit in," to leave a threatened culture and embrace the modern world? "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" is my personal favorite—here the author recalls her mother's struggle with breast cancer and revisits her own fear of as well as her own experiences with cancer. This is a story about family secrets, about sickness and about death. A story about beginnings and endings, it is also a story about vulnerability.

**Non-Fiction.** *Jewish memory is a core component of two notable works featured in this essay—Taking Root and Going South. In both works, oral history is used—and used successfully—as an activist method of producing knowledge about Jewish women's experiences.*

**Taking Root: Narratives of Jewish Women in Latin America.** Edited by Marjorie Agosin. What has it meant to be a Jewish woman in Latin America at the end of the 20th century? In *Taking Root*, 22 Latin American women of Jewish descent, from Mexico to Uruguay, recall their coming of age with Sabbath candles and Hebrew candles, Latino songs and merengue music, Queen Esther and the Virgin of Guadalupe. Rich and poor, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, Jewish immigrant families searched for homes and identities in predominantly Catholic societies. Based on first- and second-generation immigrant experience, these stories describe differing points of view and levels of involvement in Jewish tradition and depict the immense diversity of the Latin American Jewish experience. Contributors include writers of international distinction as well as others who have occupied pivotal professional lives in their respective countries. Poet and professor of Spanish at Wellesley College, Agosin provides readers with an accessible collection of essays that examine the religious, economic, social and political choices these families have made and continue to make as they forge Jewish identities in the New World. Readers interested in the Jewish presence in Latin America and the literature of displacement in general should not let this collection escape their attention.

**Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement.** By Debra L. Schultz. Thumbs up to feminist historian Schultz for this important portrait of an often overlooked group whose work, both behind the scenes and on the front lines, helped transform our nation. Organized around a rich blend of oral histories, *Going South* follows a group of 15 Jewish women, coming of age in the shadow of the Holocaust and deeply committed to social justice. These are boundary-crossing, northern Jewish women who had the opportunity, means and will to put their bodies on the line to challenge the

## FROM THE CLASSICS

When Hillel the Elder had concluded a class session with his disciples, he left the House of Study with them. The disciples asked him where he was going. He replied: "To fulfill a religious obligation." "What is the religious obligation?" the disciples wanted to know. He replied, "I'm going to the bathhouse to have a bath." The disciples were surprised, and they asked: "Is that really a religious obligation?" He answered, "Yes. If the statues of the kings that are placed in theaters and circuses are cleaned and washed daily, and if the man whose job it is to clean and wash those statues not only makes his living from this but also occupied an elevated position among the great ones of the Roman Empire, how much more does this apply to me, seeing that I have been made in the image and likeness of God. It is written in Genesis 9.6 *In the image of God did he make man.*"

—Vayikra Rabbah 34.3

entrenched system of southern racism in the 1960s. They worked primarily with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a radical spirited southern civil rights group led by young Black organizers. The experiences of the 15 women interviewed span a broad range of roles and locations in the southern civil rights movement. Actively rejecting the post-war idyll of suburban, Jewish, middle-class life, these women were deeply influenced by Jewish notions of morality and social justice. Who were these activists? How did they come to be? Where did they find support? Why did they choose to move south, when others stood still? Why did they choose to speak, when others remained silent? How did they find allies in the struggle for peace and freedom? How did they join the quest for justice and decency? And, finally, what did being Jewish mean to each of them? Readers interested in both the civil rights movement and, particularly, in women civil rights workers as well as those interested in the history of Jewish women's political activity, will not be disappointed.

**In a category by itself...** *Diaries are a powerful literary device; in the skilled hands of June Leavitt, the personal narrative becomes a poignant and wrenching story.* **Storm of Terror: A Hebron Mother's Diary.** by June Leavitt. What would it be like to live with terrorism day in and day out? To bury loved ones weekly? What would it be like to be an ex-American, raising five children in Hebron, miles from the West Bank of Israel? Living in the midst of violence, from Rosh Hashanah in September 2000, the Jewish New Year, when Stage 2 of the Intifada broke out in Israel, through the next 18 months (through April 2002), June Leavitt wrote this disturbingly candid diary that chronicles the complexity, the humanity and the danger of everyday settler life on the West Bank. Leavitt shows readers how difficult a country Israel is to live in. At the same time, she shows readers why parents would want to raise their children in Israel and why, in the midst of terror, many Jews would never consider leaving Israel, why many still believe in the promise of Arabs and Jews living together. The Arab-Israeli conflict has been a part of our lives since 1993; revived Arab terrorism and national trauma are increasingly *de rigueur*. We know that Jerusalem has become a war zone but, personally, what does this mean, really? Providing a window into this world, Leavitt challenges readers to think about what it means to be strong, what it means to survive. Leavitt emigrated to Israel in 1979 with her husband and two-year-old son. She teaches English at a local school in Hebron and writes.

**Last but not Least...** *Books on intimacy as*

*well as those that honor the mysteries of love and relationship continue to be popular. Witness the continuing popularity of Thomas Moore's Soul Mates (HarperCollins), a companion volume to the national bestseller Care of the Soul. In Soul Mates, Moore explores how relationships of all kinds, with all their difficulties, deepen our lives and help fulfill the needs of the soul. For many, the creation and maintenance of soulful relationships are quests that span a lifetime. The following title is not without its shortcomings, as noted; however, it is mentioned here because it addresses soul-intimacy from another perspective—the Jewish perspective.*

**The Committed Marriage: A Guide to Finding a Soulmate and Building a Relationship Through Timeless Biblical Wisdom.** by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis. Drawing on experience gained from her own marriage of more than 40 years, as well as her strong faith in the healing power of prayer and tradition, Rebbetzin Jungreis outlines some common marital problems and their solution. She offers practical, optimistic advice on how to find a mate by becoming a desirable mate; how spouses can strengthen their marriage by strengthening their own identities; how couples can communicate in a loving, compassionate way even in the midst of hurts and arguments; and how faith can provide a loving foundation for marriage. This book is as much about the religious aspects of marriage as it is about interpersonal communication.

Several caveats bear mentioning. Jungreis believes in the concept of soul mates; indeed, readers that question this concept will have difficulty with this book. Note that Jungreis does not set out to explore other relationships; readers interested in soul mates of other kinds (for example: friends, partnerships in work or business, relationships with family members) will be disappointed. Designed to meet the needs of a particular niche market, this book is not geared to the needs of every person—its message is for married Jewish couples. Individuals who, for whatever personal or political reasons, question the institution of marriage as we currently know it in Western society also will have difficulty with this text. Lastly, Jewish lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender readers would be better served by other texts.

These caveats aside, Jungreis' book is much more than a book that is concerned with making relationships work better. Filled with practical wisdom, deep feeling and much love, *The Committed Marriage* may provide a missing piece for married Jewish couples.

*Sarah Barbara Watstein is the director of Academic User Services, VCU Libraries, and a contributing editor.*

## The Fundamentals of Fundamentalism

### Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic and Jewish Movements

by Richard T. Antoun  
Walnut Creek, CA:  
Alta Mira Press

A Review Essay  
by Peter J. Haas

The term "fundamentalism" comes from a series of pamphlets entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* published between 1910 and 1915. The point of the pamphlets was to counter the advance of modernism and liberal theology that were seen by conservatives as overtaking American Christianity at the turn of the century. By now, nearly 100 years later, the term has moved beyond its historical meaning and has become a generalized term with a much broader, and much less clearly defined, meaning. It is used, almost promiscuously, as a general description of movements of any type, Western or Eastern, that use religious language, rhetoric and imagery as part of their protest against the prevailing political and/or social reality of their situation. So we talk of Christian fundamentalists in North America in connection with advocating, say, prayer in the public schools; Jewish fundamentalists in Israel in connection with demands that major thoroughfares be closed on the Sabbath; Islamic fundamentalists in connection with sending suicide bombers into Israel; and even Hindu fundamentalists in connection with battling Muslims in India regarding who controls certain sacred ground. It seems to me that it is still an open question as to whether or not all these diverse events really share some common feature that legitimates their all being gathered under the label of "fundamentalism." But the unquestioned assumption of the book before us is that all of these are indeed instances of "fundamentalism" and that they do share some feature, or rather set of features, in common. The book sets out to identify what that shared set of features might be.

The book, to my mind, fails at some foundational level. The reason is that the author, an anthropologist who did some field work in a Jordanian village, too often lets description, even some fairly thick description, substitute for explanation. This is not to diminish the importance of his descriptive work. Antoun has a good anthropological eye and he does help us see the inner dynamics of many of his encounters, whether with a village preacher in Jordan, a teacher at Bethany Baptist Academy in America,

Afrikaner celebrants of the Day of the Covenant in South Africa or the life of a Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community in Israel. What is lacking is any deeper analysis as to what these diverse descriptions might be pointing to at a more rudimentary level and any discussion of what deeper structural or semiotic features they share under the surface.

This is not to say the book is without any methodological foundation. In his Introduction, Antoun, in good anthropological practice, tells us a good bit about himself and so his possible biases and innate perspectives. He also introduces us briefly to five different theories or postulates about the nature of "fundamentalism" that will serve as the scaffold for his own study. These five approaches are: (1) Henry Munson's claim that fundamentalism is a world view of being on God's side, a conclusion based on Munson's archaeological fieldwork in Morocco; (2) Bruce Lawrence's observation that Muslim fundamentalist movements tend to be dominated by frustrated, often middle-class educated males; (3) A qualification on this through the sociological analysis of American Protestantism and Iranian Shiite revolutionaries done by Martin Riesebrodt, who argues for shared experiences that cross class and social lines; (4) A linkage to political activism as noted by Ian Lustick in his study of the Israel right-wing group *Gush Emunim*; and (5) A complex reaction to change, urbanization and modernization as noted by Daniel Levine and David Stoll in their study of the spread of Protestantism in Latin America. Antoun is not in the least interested in choosing among these alternatives. Quite the opposite, he tells us that all contain some truth and that every instance of fundamentalism includes one, and usually several, of these characteristics.

Before moving on, it needs to be noted that even to bring these five views together in conversation is to make two big assumptions. One is, as we have already noted, that they are all talking about the same "thing," namely "fundamentalism." The other assumption is that these five views are on the same methodological plane; that is, that by juxtaposing them we are comparing apples to apples and not apples to oranges or even to bicycles. These assumptions are never stated, let alone argued for. In fact, no case is made for why just these five approaches and not, say, only three of them or why others are left out. Instead, the book proceeds simply to assume these five and, in each of the next five chapters, takes one as its central motif. In each case, the approach is not examined or analyzed but is taken pretty much at face value. The chapter fleshes it out through anecdotal illustrations. As noted above, many of the descriptions and cross religious comparisons are interesting, even compelling, but there is no methodological

depth to their application, no investigation as to how, or to what extent or in what way, each illustrates, qualifies or reshapes the paradigm under consideration. The facts, as they are presented, are allowed to speak for themselves. Nor is there any attempt at the end of each chapter to draw conclusions about either the paradigm or its application in the real world. The end result is a book of thematic anthropological descriptions and little else. We learn nothing new about the five models, how they apply or how Antoun's observations give them new form, quality or depth.

The book does serve another, more modest yet still important, function, insofar as it gets us to think of diverse religious actions and modes of rhetoric as somehow related to this general post-modern phenomenon we have come to label "fundamentalism." It does point in the direction of a conclusion that what appear to be diverse sorts of religious conflicts may in fact share some features that legitimately can be understood, or partially understood, in terms of the other. (Whether "fundamentalism" is an apt term for this commonality is another question entirely.) For students, the book can well serve as a launching pad for a discussion of what fundamentalism might or might not be. And it helps place some of the religious violence in Israel, Ireland and India into a more understandable common framework, showing that they all bear some structural, or at least anthropological, similarities to religious patterns closer to home with which we are more familiar, say in Indianapolis. With its readable style and wealth of real-life descriptions, this book can be a good tool for students. It is just that for scholars looking to understand fundamentalism on a more theoretical level, this is not the book.

*Peter J. Haas holds the Abba Hillel Silver Chair of Jewish Studies at Case Western Reserve University, and is a contributing editor.*

### FROM THE CLASSICS

A non-Jew once came to Shammai and said to him: "Convert me to Judaism on condition that you can teach me the whole Torah while I am standing on one foot." With a builder's measuring rod in his hand, Shammai angrily threw him out. The non-Jew then went to Hillel and repeated his request. Hillel converted him and taught him as follows: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary. Go now and study it!"

—*Talmud Shabbat 31a*

## Hasidic Parables, Hasidic Polemics

*The Hasidic Parable: An Anthology with Commentary*  
by Aryeh Wineman  
Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society

*The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*  
by David Berger  
Oxford, England: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

A Review Essay  
by Matthew Schwartz

Dr. Aryeh Wineman's *The Hasidic Parable* is modest in size and gentle in tone, but it offers an excellent introduction to the treasure house of Hasidic thought. It is also a study of parables as part of world literature, inviting comparison to other genre of parable like the Sufi and the Gnostic. Dr. Wineman's feeling for his subject is tangible as he discovers its "inwardness and depth." The book consists of an anthology of parables drawn mostly from the early Hasidic masters and augmented by Wineman's own commentary. He delves into the deeper meaning and avoids being caught up in polemic or technicality. The use of parables is, of course, very ancient but parables are particularly suited to oral teaching, which was so important in the early generations of Hasidism. The purpose of the Hasidic parable is to challenge accepted ways of looking at things, to offer deeper insight and ultimately to metamorphose both one's understanding and behavior. Where the unadorned truth is often hard to accept, parable lends truth its beautiful multi-colored garments till truth finds favor, said one rabbi (p. XVII). R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev said that a parable helps bring closer to the human mind what is born in the kiss of the divine word (p. XX). The great Maggid of Mezeritch compared a parable to *tsimtsum*, the kabbalistic notion of God limiting Himself so that there is room for other things to exist. God contracts and restricts His thought so that He can teach people, just as a highly learned adult restricts himself so that he can teach a child. Parable and *tsimtsum* are a single process. Dr. Wineman feels that parables speak well to the spiritual quest of modern people and especially to the contemporary Jew. The Hasidic parable introduces us into a world view in which what matters is man's relationship to God. It is in this search that he finds spiritual education and fulfillment. Not that the physical world is unimportant. Hasidism is not monkish or



ascetic but it has sought the higher joy of closeness to God.

Even in relating to God, parables can be very helpful. The Maggid of Mezeritch told the parable of a king who decided to scrutinize the deeds of his subjects. Greatly distressed, the people sent a man who could act like a clown to appear before the king with praise, humor and parables. The clown gave the king great joy, and the people came through the judgment successfully. The Maggid told this parable in the context of a homily about Rosh Hashana, teaching that God's judgment of man is actually a mask disguising God's love and compassion as well as expressing the joy of redemption. This parable also underlines the value of human song and joy.

Another parable of the Maggid sees prayer as a transcendence of the self. Man has a body and therefore tends to see himself as distant from God, but the Maggid teaches the body is a house of God that can lead man to Him. Another parable about a song without words is used by the Maggid to show that although words are very much a part of prayer, it is more important for prayer to

activate a deeper level of the self.

There is something wonderfully positive about the wisdom of these parables as well as their simple but profound way of expressing that wisdom. God is always present, and things that can seem threatening or harmful can in fact be deeply beneficial. Fear, displeasure, love and happiness can all be ways God uses to awaken a person spiritually. Even alien thoughts disrupting one's concentration during prayer can serve a purpose. A parable entitled "Transforming Sadness" teaches that sadness and guilt can involve a preoccupation with the self. Joy must capture and convert sadness. One Hasidic master taught that some remorse is unavoidable but it should be limited to one hour a day.

A true perspective is taught in the Maggid's parable of a king's young child who built himself a little house of sticks. A man came along and smashed the house. The child went to his royal father, complaining and crying, and the king laughed, knowing the loss was insignificant in comparison with the beautiful palace he was planning to build his son. The parable points to the difference between divine and human perspectives. Sometimes the prayers of a righteous person seem at the moment to go unheeded. This can be a mark of God's affection, for all the concerns of this world cannot compare with the good awaiting people in the world to come.

Another parable comes from the Berditchever. A king ordered his servant to learn how to shoot a gun. During practice, no fire is placed in the gun for there is no need for fire. Later when the servant actually goes to war, he is easily defeated for he still tries to shoot without any fire. The Berditchever explained the Torah was given to man as black fire on white fire so that it could fight against the evil inclination. When people perform a commandment with enthusiasm, they can go to the core of that commandment, which is fire. If people perform the commandments without enthusiasm, they are like the servant who has no fire in his gun. A good deed performed without *hitalhavut* (from *lahav*/flame) holds no fervor, love or awe and is a failed deed (pp. 142-43).

One parable expresses the need of the holy man for his followers. A bird is perched high on a tree. If someone wants to reach the bird, he must stand on the shoulders of others. The holy man can attain his goals in spiritual leadership only with the help and support of the community.

A very interesting chapter is devoted to parables using certain universal motifs, like a wedding feast or an exiled prince, and how the Hasidic teachers adapted these to their own purposes. Some of the exiled prince parables resemble the powerful ancient Gnostic "Hymn of the Pearl." In one of the many

Hasidic adaptations, the Rabbi of Tzanz told of a prince who sinned against his father and was sent away from the palace. As long as he stayed near the palace people treated him well but as he wandered farther away he became less and less like a prince. Finally, he completely forgot his origin and worked as a simple shepherd. One day, the people of the area heard that the king was coming and prepared notes for him with various requests, as was the custom. The erstwhile prince requested some straw for his hut. The king recognized his son's writing and was distressed the prince had so forgotten who he was that he could feel the lack only of a little straw. The rabbi explained—we can forget that each one of us is a prince and we can forget to ask for what we really could have. The stories raise the question to what degree shall one identify with his transitory needs and to what degree with the deeper aspects of his being.

The final parable in the book is the famous and profound story about a man from Cracow who was told in a dream to find a hidden treasure in Prague. This story too offers a variety of interpretations at several levels and has parallels in non-Jewish folk literature as well.

Yet some find that not everything in Hasidism is beautiful. In a very different sort of book Professor David Berger, an ordained Centrist Orthodox rabbi and a well established expert on the Jewish-Christian polemics of the Middle Ages, has penned a polemic of his own. *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* is a memoir of Professor Berger's personal crusade against Lubavitch messianism during the last several years and also of his frustration at the lack of support he has received in the Orthodox community. His charges are serious and expressed in strong words. Probably only time will tell how right or wrong he may be or whether his method of approach is useful. Let us first summarize Professor Berger's main ideas, then offer a response.

Dr. Berger informs us from page one that this is not his usual dispassionate historical study but a very emotional book—"an indictment, a lament and an appeal." He strongly accuses Lubavitch Hasidism of making a messiah of its rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson, who died in 1994 without leaving a successor. Some hasidim believe he is still living and a few even believe the rebbe to possess some sort of deity. This has brought Lubavitch into an area of belief close to Christian concepts of Jesus or to certain Jewish sectarian movements like Sabbatianism. Dr. Berger sees great danger to core beliefs of Judaism, in particular to the Jewish belief in a messiah and certainly there has been, until now, almost no trace in Judaism of the idea of a resurrected messiah. Lubavitcher

## FROM THE CLASSICS

The Roman government once forbade the Jews to study the Torah and to live according to its provisions. But Pappus ben Judah saw that Rabbi Akiba had convened a public gathering for the purpose of Torah study. Pappus said to him: "Akiba, are you not afraid of the government?" Akiba replied: "I will explain the situation to you with a parable. One day a fox was strolling along by the banks of a river. He saw how the fishes were anxiously swimming around from place to place. He asked them: 'From what are you trying to escape?' The fishes answered: 'From the nets that people have cast for us.' The fox said: 'Why do you not come up and find safety on land, so that you and I can live together in peace, just as my ancestors have done with your ancestors in the past?' But the fishes replied: 'Are you really the one whom they call the most clever of animals? You are not clever at all, but quite dumb. If we are already afraid in the element in which we live, how much more would we have to be afraid in the element in which we are certainly going to die? And thus is the matter with us. If we are already in a dangerous situation when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is stated, *For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure*, (Deuteronomy 30:20), how much more dangerous would our situation be were we to neglect the Torah!"

—Talmud Berachot 61b

# NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

*Editor's Note: The following is a list of books received from publishers but, as of this printing, have not been reviewed for Menorah Review.*

***The Divided People: Can Israel-S Breakup be Stopped.*** By Eva Etzioni-Halevy. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

***The Biblical Encounter: How the Temple in Jerusalem Was Built.*** By Max Schwartz. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House Inc.

***Kibbutzniks in the Diaspora.*** By Naama Sabar. Albany: State University of New York Press.

***The Kibbutz: Awakening From Utopia.*** By Daniel Gavron. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Inc.

***The Life of Judaism.*** Edited by Harvey E. Goldberg. Berkeley: University of California Press.

***Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City.*** By Bernard Wasserstein. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

***Divergent Jewish Cultures: Israel and America.*** Edited by Deborah Dash Moore and S. Ilan Troen. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

***Beyond the Chuppah: A Jewish Guide to Happy Marriages.*** By Joel Crohn, et al. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

***Jews Without Judaism: Conversations with an Unconventional Rabbi.*** By Rabbi Daniel Friedman. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

***Somber Lust: The Art of Amos Oz.*** By Yair Mazor. Albany: State University of New York Press.

***The Transformation of Palestinian Politics: From Revolution to State-Building.*** By Barry Rubin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

***The Jewish Self-Image in the West.*** By Michael Berkowitz. New York University Press.

***The Plunder of Jewish Property During the Holocaust: Confronting European History.*** Edited by Avi Beker. New York University Press.

***Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse.*** By Hannan Hever. New York University Press.

***Gershom Scholem: A Life of Letters, 1914-1982.*** Edited by Anthony David Skinner. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

***Auschwitz.*** By Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

***The Holocaust on Trial.*** By D.D. Guttenplan. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

***Hitler's Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military.*** By Bryan Mark Rigg. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

***The Voice of Memory: Interviews 1961-1987 Primo Levi.*** Edited by Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon. New York: The New Press.

***Dinah's Daughters: Gender and Judaism From the Hebrew Bible to Late Antiquity.*** By Helen Zlotnick. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

***A Homeland in the West: Utah Jews Remember.*** By Eileen Hallett Stone. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press.

***The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity.*** By Bernhard Lang. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

***The Laws of Yahweh: A Handbook of Biblical Law.*** By William J. Doorly. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

***Not a Simple Story: Love and Politics in a Modern Hebrew Novel.*** By Sharon M. Green. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Inc.

***Divided Souls: Converts From Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750.*** By Elisheva Carlebach. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

***Rabbinic Stories.*** Translated and introduced by Jeffrey L. Rubenstein. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

***Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans.*** By Erich S. Gruen. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

***A Wolf in the Attic: The Legacy of a Hidden Child of the Holocaust.*** By Sophie Richman. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

***Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews and the Changing Face of the Ghetto.*** By Wendell Pritchett. The University of Chicago Press.

***The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance Between Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC.*** By Henry T. Aubin. New York: SOHO Press.

***Her Works Praise Her: A History of Jewish Women in America From Colonial Times to the Present.*** By Hasia R. Diner and Beryl Lieff Benderly. New York: Basic Books.

***Less Than Slaves: Jewish Forced Labor and the Quest for Compensation.*** By Benjamin B. Ferencz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

***A Double Thread: Growing Up English and Jewish in London.*** By John Gross. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher.

***Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation.*** By Moshe Idel. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

***Jerusalem: A City and Its Future.*** Edited by Marshall J. Breger and Ora Ahimeir. Syracuse University Press.

***Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism.*** By Dana Evan Kaplan. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Inc.



messianism threatens many areas of Jewish life, as messianists occupy key positions in Jewish communities as synagogue rabbis, teachers, ritual slaughterers and administrators. A Montreal Lubavitcher messianist was appointed the head of the city's rabbinical court shortly after signing a statement that Jewish law requires all Jews to accept the messiahship of the rebbe.

Professor Berger calls himself a tolerant man and a longtime admirer of Lubavitch's many real achievements. However, a new messianism threatens the very essence of the faith. "It is an earthquake in the history of Judaism" (p. 3). In fact, assertions of the rebbe's messiahship began to appear some years before the rebbe's passing, although no statement by the rebbe seems to have been very specific on the issue. Yet, it may well be that the rebbe did not discourage the ascription of messiahship to himself. In Orthodox circles, both R. Aaron Kotler and R. Eliezer Schach had years ago openly criticized these tendencies. Dr. Berger began to be deeply disturbed by a number of Lubavitch practices such as some who pray in the presence of a picture of the rebbe and those who mention the rebbe's name during certain religious ceremonies or prayers.

Greatly disturbed by the growing messianism in Lubavitch, especially after the rebbe's death, Dr. Berger began to publish articles and write to Orthodox leaders, expressing his concerns but was astonished and deeply disappointed to find that people reacted slowly, unwilling to believe all this was really happening. Dr. Berger reports receiving some private or even indirect statements of support, notably from R. Chaim Keller of Telshe Yeshiva in Chicago and from R. Yaacov Weinberg of Ner Israel Yeshiva in Baltimore. However, the leading Orthodox institutions have not gone on the warpath against Lubavitch, even after a few Lubavitch writers expressed a belief in the actual divinity of the rebbe (this is not widely accepted even among the messianists).

Dr. Berger would like to see the messianists blacklisted. Not one of them should hold a rabbinic pulpit or a teaching position; no money should be given to their institutions; people should not eat from their ritual slaughterers; they should not be allowed to serve as witnesses; one should not pray in a messianist synagogue. Professor Berger is deeply concerned not only about the future of Judasim but even about the damage already done. He reaches a cre-

scendo of emotion and melodrama with a page headed "Epitaph"—"As we observe the death throes of a fundamental Jewish belief, let us not deceive ourselves as to the identity of its executioners. They are not the messianists... The messianists may have launched the assault, but Orthodox Jewry writ large has administered the fatal blow... If so let this book serve as a eulogy."

The issue raised in this book, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference*, is certainly important. However, Dr. Berger's cases both against Lubavitch and the Orthodox leadership fall short of being entirely convincing. How much does any of this go beyond the "lunatic fringe" percentage that must be expected with any large social or religious movement? Has Judaism indeed reached a point where it must suppress Lubavitch or else face total failure? As an alert to the possible growth of a canker within Lubavitch, Dr. Berger's book has made its point. However, the reader will remain unsure whether this problem is ephemeral and not widespread, or if it is as threatening as Dr. Berger argues.

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